



REMEMBRANCE SERVICE
FOR
GAJINDER SINGH BABRAA
3RD JANUARY 1936 – 11TH MAY 2013



SUNDAY 16TH MARCH, 2014
SIKH GURDWARA, SOUTH LONDON

Obituary: Late Sardar Gajinder Singh Babraa

My husband, Sardar Gajinder Singh Babraa, who had a profound faith in the Will of God, sadly passed away on 11 May 2013, at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, South East London. He died peacefully of multiple organ failure. His cremation (Antam Sanskar), took place on the 24 May and the final Bhog ceremony and Ardas took place at the Ramgarhia Association Sikh Temple in Woolwich.

Gajinder Singh was born on 3 January 1936 to Sardarni Sheel Kaur in Lahore. Gajinder's father Sardar Narain Singh was running a very successfully established family marble business in Lahore. Unfortunately during the time of the partition of India in 1947, they had to leave everything behind and move to India for safety and settled in Delhi to start life again. Gajinder was eleven at the time and he never forgot the gruesome scenes of the slaughter of people and destruction of property. Gajinder's family, when in Lahore and later in India was popularly known and recognised as Pathranwale due to their marble business.

Having had his primary education in Lahore, he continued his secondary education in Delhi. He went to Panjab University in Amritsar and obtained a BSc degree in 1955. As was Gajinder's wish, after gaining work experience in different fields in India, he came to Britain in 1957 to study architecture at the Brixton School of Building. It was difficult to fund his education from India due to very strict monetary foreign exchange regulations, so Gajinder took up work first with T P Bennett & Sons and then with Co-operative Planning Ltd, both architectural firms, so that he could fund his education and continue to study as an external student. He received his BArch degree in 1972 and by this time, because of his very good work, had already become a team leader at Co-operative Planning Ltd. He later became the CEO of the practice.

During his time with Co-operative Planning, to his credit Gajinder designed many housing schemes, community centres, old peoples' homes, office buildings and churches around the country, as besides the London office, Co-operative Planning had branch offices in Manchester and Liverpool. Gajinder remembered with great pride the designing of five Mormon churches, the biggest of these five Mormon Churches being in London. Gajinder who had the reputation of being a very good leader, a very good architect and an extremely disciplined worker, had the opportunity to serve as one of the Directors of the International Housing Develop-

ments. He was also an Advisor to the Ministry of Overseas Development for Housing.

After voluntary retirement, Gajinder went into private practice in 1980 and established his own business in the name of Harpreet Developments Ltd. Whilst in his own practice designing the Sikh Gurdwara South London in Southfields was a landmark in the many projects he did. Sir Mota Singh, current Chairman of the Management Board of the Sikh Gurdwara South London, sent the following message to me which was read as a tribute to Gajinder Singh. Sir Mota Singh could not attend the funeral service due to ill health.

"The Sangat of the Sikh Gurdwara South London is deeply saddened to learn of the death of Sardar Gajinder Singh Babraa. 40 years ago when the sangat of Southfields wanted to build a Gurdwara in this area and funds were scarce Sardar Gajinder Singh volunteered – as a Gursikh – to help the sangat to design the building and obtain the planning permission. He worked extremely hard in his own time to design the magnificent Gurdwara that we have today in Southfields and made all the submissions to the local Council for planning permission. In accordance with the Guru's teachings he never expected or asked for any recognition – Nishkam Sewa. The sangat of Sikh Gurdwara South London will always be indebted to Sardar Gajinder Singh for the excellent facilities that we have and which will remain forever a testament to the memory of this wonderful sewadar. The sangat of the SGSL sends its heartfelt condolences to you and your family at this difficult time and we pray that Waheguru Ji receives Sardar Gajinder Singh in his heavenly abode and gives you and your family the fortitude to bear his loss."

Gajinder Singh had helped other gurdwaras such as the Shepherds Bush gurdwara for which he designed the dome and porches. He was also involved over many years in the renovation work of Ramgarhia Gurdwara in Woolwich and had the privilege to serve on its Executive Committee in 1986/87. In their continuing thematic series on Design and Technology, Thames Television made a programme on Places of Worship based on the making of Southfield Gurdwara and Gajinder Singh its architect. The programme was televised on Channel 4 in November 1992. The series were about telling and showing secondary school children about what an architect has to know about the requirement and use of the building before designing it. He also had the opportunity of giving a very informative talk on Gurdwaras and Sikh Architecture to a large London audience.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my family's and my sincerest gratitude to Sardar Sewa Singh Nandra, the President of the Ramgarhia Association Sikh Temple Woolwich, for personally taking full responsibility for doing the necessary preparations required at the gurdwara and the crematorium for his funeral. He also spoke of the work Gajinder Singh had done to improve the facilities at the Gurdwara. We would also like to sincerely thank every other person at the gurdwara who in one way or the other helped us in our difficult time. Sardar Swaran Singh Riyat of Bromley in his address highlighted how Gajinder Singh had looked after my parents when unfortunately my younger brother died. We would also like to sincerely thank all our family friends and in particular Bikramjit Singh Seehra and his wife Narinder Kaur for their continued support throughout our difficult time. Our thanks are due to all those people from far and near, who participated in the funeral service and made it a memorable day for us. We are grateful to everyone who made a donation to the Diabetes UK. The total amount collected came to £600.

We have had innumerable messages of condolences sent to the family and the common theme in all the messages has been Gajinder's nobility of character, his humility, his courtesy, his generosity, his charming manners, his reliability and his willingness to help whoever came to him. Although he went out of his way to help whoever needed his assistance, it was a cardinal principle of his never to exploit any of his many contacts to seek a personal favour. To the public he was an architect and an advisor, but to his family he was a towering pillar of strength and someone who was present on all important family functions and made sure that everything went smoothly. He touched the soul of every member of the family no matter who they were.

Gajinder Singh is survived by his son Harpreet Singh, a Quality Director at Ramboll, an engineering consultancy company and his wife Satvinder Kaur, an educational psychologist and two grandsons Jaipal Singh and Nivraj Singh.

Davinder Kaur Babraa

London

Rich Heritage of the Late Sardar Gajinder Singh Babraa

In the Obituary of my late husband Gajinder Singh Babraa, published in the 1st to 15th August 2013 issue of this paper, I mentioned that my husband's family in Lahore and later in India was popularly known and recognised as Pathranwale due to their business in the marble industry. My husband's heritage history dates back to the time when Great Britain was ruling over India and Pakistan was not in existence.

Gajinder's grandfather, known as Dhian Singh Pathranwale (1848 – 1938) was the son of Sardar Boota Singh and Mata Har Kaur. He was an eminent Sikh businessman in Lahore and it would be absolutely appropriate to say that he was an integral part of the Namdhari (Kuka) movement in Lahore. Whilst Dhian Singh obtained his gift of Naam (remembering God's name) from Namdhari Satguru Ram Singh, his spiritual development took place in the company of Guru Hari Singh and Guru Partap Singh. Actually Dhian Singh's father Boota Singh and his father Bishna were the first in the family to become Namdharis.

What I am going to write is based on the thoughts and recollections I would hear many times from my husband. This information has also been written by many writers and historians in their books and magazine articles. It makes me proud that by marriage to Gajinder Singh I became part of this historical family. Dhian Singh was born and brought up in Chotian Galotian in the district of Sialkot. At that time there were no schools around the area, so he went to the local Gurdwara to learn to read and write Gurmukhi. Dhian Singh, who set up his business in Lahore, led a life of a householder and whilst dwelling on Waheguru's name, he spent his time serving people in whatever way the service was needed.

My husband's grandfather first started construction work and built up his experience in small jobs. He eventually got a job to build a bridge in a place called Sakhar and became the Project Manager. Upon the Chief Engineer's advice he started producing and supplying bricks for the project. However nature had a different plan. Due to disastrous floods, Dhian Singh's bricks and the other builders' bricks were washed away. Whilst all the builders put in a claim to the government to recover loss, Dhian Singh did not as he told the officer that the destruction of the bricks was a natural cause and it was against his conscience to take advantage of the situation. He eventually accepted the cost price of the bricks. After this incident he started getting contract after contract which made him very rich and famous. In 1912 – 1913 there was a Sikh Educational Conference organised in Lahore under the Chairmanship of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia. Dhian Singh took the full responsibility of providing food (langar) for the conference delegates.

When Sunder Singh took the Governor of Punjab to view the facilities for langar, they found Dhian Singh cleaning dishes. These two men were surprised to see that such a rich man was doing such a menial job. After introductions Dhian Singh said, "What I have is God's gift. I am giving it back to God's people. The real service (sewa) I am doing is the cleaning of the dishes." The Governor was astonished and said that he had come to realize that "Sikhism is a great religion in the world where modesty and service are prime ideals." Dhian Singh had often provided langar at many other large conferences in and around Lahore, such as the one in 1929 for All India Congress when Namdharies became well known for providing langar.

Dhian Singh's enormous residence (Haveli), with forty rooms on each floor, was in front of the famous Bhati Darvaza in Lahore. Beyond the Haveli's large regal gates, the ground floor had a large courtyard in the middle and was used to keep cars, horses and had guest rooms, where Namdharies and other people who had no where else to go were able to rest overnight for free. The first floor was used for family and important guests, while the second floor was entirely for the family's residence. The family also had a cinema near the Haveli. They also had a Gole Kothi (round building) in a well to do area in Lahore, which is presently used by the Chief of the Rangers' Police in Lahore. The adjoining building was the family's marble factory. In 2004 when my husband took me to Pakistan to see where he lived, we found that the site of the former Haveli and the factory had become a public park. When my husband's family left Lahore in 1947, people there burnt the buildings hoping to find wealth buried in the basement. The cinema, however, was still there.

Dhian Singh, who had taken over the family business from his father Boota Singh, started the Marble business and became a very successful business man. In their household everything from plates, glasses, crockery, water jugs and serving bowls were made of silver. Their servants wore special uniforms according to their duties. Dhian Singh had horses and horse stables in addition to several cars which included a custom built Rolls Royce. He had two daughters and four sons. His youngest son Sant Singh died at a young age.

Both his daughters were married to Satguru Partap Singh's younger brothers. Satwant Kaur was married to Maharaj Nihal Singh in 1914 and Kartar Kaur was married to Maharaj Gurdial Singh in 1921, thus sealing the two families into permanent relationship. These two weddings have been deemed extremely historic as they were attended by hundreds of people, which included the political and religious leaders of the day, something that has never been seen again.

At the age of 80 Dhian Singh handed his business to his remaining three sons and retired to his village Galotian Khurd in Sialkot and spent his time in building the Damdama Sahib Gurdwara. He died at the age of 90. His eldest son Gurdit Singh was already leading a separate life so the responsibility of the family business fell upon Narain Singh (21.12.1895-29.9.1973) and his younger brother Kartar Singh. Narain Singh, who visited Britain and European countries in 1927 to buy machinery for their marble factory, was my husband Gajinder Singh's father. Over the years Kartar Singh got involved in politics and was the first Sikh to become a member of the Municipal Corporation of Lahore. Kartar Singh studied sculpturing in the Lahore School of Arts and to his credit designed many memorials, such as the one in Agricultural College in Layalpur. All the marble work in the Karachi Parliament building was done by Pathranwale as were many headstones for Christian graves. Their custom built Rolls Royce was used to carry hearses for burial by the British. The fountain with the face of a lion at the Government College Lahore, the statue at the Chiefs College Lahore and all the marble work at the Khalsa College Amritsar and all the marble work at the twelve door drawing room of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was done by Pathranwale.

Narain Singh had the major responsibility of running the business which was at its optimum level, but everything fell to ground zero when the Indian/Pakistan partition took place in 1947. The family left their riches behind and escaped to India where they settled in Karol Bagh in New Delhi. Kartar Singh continued to be involved in the marble business and was also involved in politics in New Delhi where he mingled with people in power such as India's President Giani Zail Singh and the Prime Ministers Jawahar Lal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Kartar Singh, who continued to be an active follower of the Namdhari Guru, passed away in the early 1980's.

Narain Singh's life took a completely different turn. His two daughters, now both deceased, were married when they were still in Lahore. They were well settled, the older one in Kenya and the younger one in Amritsar. Whilst in Karol Bagh he helped his older son Inder Singh (12.9.1916 – 27.6.1984) set up his own business and Gajinder Singh continued with his education, my father-in-law spent his time in the company of Sant Harnam Singh (1877 – 1980) of Kilaywale Nushera Majha Singh whom he knew from Lahore. Sant Ji also left Lahore with his sangat at the time of the partition and first came to Amritsar and then settled in Nushera Majha Singh. Narain Singh whose forefathers were devoted Namdharies and whose two sisters were married in the first family of Namdharies, changed direction and became a devotee of Sant Harnam Singh and spent his time with him, with the bond of love and devotion between them becoming stronger. Whenever Maharaj ji was in New Delhi he stayed with Narain Singh's family in Karol Bagh. Narain Singh would make Maharaj Ji comfortable in the house and would go on his bicycle

to every household near and far to invite them to come and meet Maharaj Ji and listen to his kirtan/katha and religious discourses. My father-in-law did this for the rest of his life whilst his son Inder Singh looked after their successful business in Power Presses. Langar prepared with great devotion by my mother-in-law, Sheel Kaur, was always served to the sangat who attended. Narain Singh became well known for his sewa and closeness to Maharaj Ji and for his bicycle rounds to invite people.

It was during one of Narain Singh and his family's visit to Nushera in 1957 when Gajinder Singh put it to Maharaj Ji that it was his wish to come to England to study Architecture but he was concerned that his parents would not let him. Maharaj Ji said, "Yes you go with my blessings. Your parents will agree to what I say." Sant Bhagwan Ji and Sant Munsha Singh Ji who were also present, fully supported the idea and Gajinder Singh came to England in September 1957. In the early 1970's during one of his trips to India, when Gajinder Singh met Maharaj Ji, he told him that he wanted to return home. Maharaj Ji said, "You went to England with my blessings and now you stay there. When we need you back here we will tell you so." Gajinder Singh's wish to go back to India never transpired. Gajinder Singh, who never touched alcohol and was a vegetarian all his life, and had survived as the last remaining sibling from the family of Sardar Narain Singh, remained devoted to Kilaywale Maharaj Ji to his last breath.

Davinder Kaur Babraa

London

The Ramgarhia Parliament (Fortnightly)

1st December 2013 to 15th December 2013

CONDOLENCE

I, on behalf of All India Ramgarhia Vishwakarma Federation (Regd.), New Delhi (india) convey my heartfelt condolence to Sardani Davinder Kaur Babraa and her family members on the sad demise of Sardar Gajinder Singh Babraa (London) and pray to Almighty that the departed soul may rest in peace and give enough strength to the family, nears & dears to bear this unbearable ad irreparable loss.

Jagjit Singh Reehal

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